

LADY ABERDEEN TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES OF A CANADIAN WINTER.

The Countess Gives a Delightful Description of the Quebec Carnival, and Many Other Things She Has Seen Since First Coming to this Country.

Our first winter in Canada! What a medley of memories it brings up!—new experiences of many kinds, a new home, new friends, new work; are all associated with bright skies, an ever glittering scene of snow and ice, and bevy of eager-faced youths and maidens, intent on some one or other of the sports which have made Canadian winters so famous.

“But the cold? Do you not feel the cold very severely?” I hear some one ask. Well, to that question I can reply with no uncertain sound. The cold may be severe, the thermometer falling once or twice during last winter to 26 and 30 degrees below zero at night in Government-house gardens; but the fact remains that one does not feel it more cold than, it so cold as at home. It is of a different quality; and our coachman, whose opinion may be considered impartial, as he has frequently to bear night exposure, says he has often felt more chilly when driving on a winter night in Aberdeenshire than in Canada. Of course one has to adapt oneself to the climate's requirements; but all the arrangements for protection against cold are so complete that there is more likelihood of suffering from too much heat than cold in the Canadian houses and railways and places of public resort. So never let fears of the severity of the climate deter anyone from making their home in Canada. Only let them come clad in the woollens which wise people wear at home as well in Canada, and be ready to adopt simple precautions to preserve ears and fingers and toes from frost bites.

There is a material made in Canada called blanket cloth, which is admirably fitted for winter wear; it is in fact, an adaptation of the blanketing worn by the Indians, and has been great in vogue amongst the merry tobogganers. But we are disposed to think that it is not sufficiently appreciated or worn by the general public. We think that the members of the government house staff never look so well as when they turn out in their dark blanket suits striped with light blue, or, on very smart occasions, in white, with the same blue, and with many-colored scarfs, woven in times gone by the French peasants, wound round their waists. It is a pity that a picture taken of our own family should not have been rendered in colors to illustrate the variety that may be obtained in these costumes—three of the children in bright blue and white, our eldest boy in red and white. His Excellency in dark and light blue, and myself in brown and yellow. But it is to the Ice Carnival time in Quebec last January that we owe our most picturesque recollection both of blanket-clad snow-shoers and of the pleasure of a Canadian winter generally.

It was the first time that one of the carnivals had been held in the quaint, historic old city overlooking the St. Lawrence, and her citizens had determined that the event should be a success. Not only in the main streets, but in the by-ways, it would be seen that the inhabitants were vying one with another as to who should do the most for the occasion. Decorations there were in abundance, also all manner of snow fortresses and buildings, arches, marvelously carved ice statues of the old heroes of Quebec, an ice model of a lion, and to crown all, an ice fortress, built of huge blocks of transparent green ice, with fortifications all around it and glittering and shimmering in the sunlight, a constant thing of beauty to all beholders.

The reality of the reign of King Winter was demonstrated on the day of our arrival by a furious blizzard of snow and hail, which delayed our train for six hours, but which at the same time gave the finishing touch to the carnival preparations by frosting over the whole. In spite of the tempest, all the snow shoe clubs had assembled in their many colored blanket costumes of white, red blue, and black, brown, and green, and purple, to receive us at the station, and insisted on themselves dragging our sleigh up the precipitous streets to the finely-designed, newly erected Chateau Frontenac—the hotel put up by the Canadian Pacific Railway, which has the distinction of adding to the beauties of the place instead of detracting from them as such edifices are wont to do. At the head of the snow-shoers, as president of the carnival was a notable figure, M. Joly de Lotbiniere, an ex-Premier of the Province, a handsome old gentleman of 70, who proved to be the very life of all the proceedings, cheering, encouraging, here, there and everywhere, forever amongst his “boys,” as he called his stalwart army of snow-shoers. He was ably supported by his lieutenants, and all the organizers of the carnival must have been proud of the results of their efforts, and of the conduct of the people. Though often waiting for long hours to see the processions, or the illuminations, or whatever it might be, never did we see the slightest disorder, or any behavior which could cast the least discredit on the character for orderliness and courtesy of the inhabitants of Quebec—no, not even on the greatest night of the attack on the ice fortress,

followed by a midnight parade of the streets.

I wish I could give a faint idea of the beauty of that scene. The fortress was lit up from within by a succession of colors—rosy pink, changing to fiery orange, and then again sea green, with aæthyst gleams flashing across it, as if the garrison within were holding high festival. And then, presently, came in sight the long defile of the attacking host, some 2,000 in number, each with torch in hand, and at last taking up their position right in front of the walls. A few minutes' suspense, and then poured forth a very shower of fire on the devoted defenders; every manner of firework was launched forth over the fortress, and myriads were the stars of many colors which poured down out of the sky. The fortress answered boldly, and two little redoubts took their part in answering fire for fire, until at last it appeared as if the whole fortress was enveloped in lurid flames, lit from within by crimson lights, and deluged with a final volley of rockets. The moment of surrender had come. M. de Lotbiniere was ascending the fortress and planting the flag of the conquerors on its turrets, and the flames faded away, leaving the fortress a cold mournful grey. The joyful troop of the jubilant snow-shoers filed down through the streets, filling the night with their shouts of triumph and their songs. We were taken around on a model locomotive belonging to one of the snow-shoe clubs, which had figured in the great procession of the day before—which I have not space to describe, but in which there were over 100 emblematic cars, also typical parties; the voyageurs, the lumbermen, the hunters, and other pioneers in Canada.

As for the games and the competitions of all sorts which were going on, I could not attempt to describe them. Hockey, the premier winter game of Canada, was of course well to the fore, exciting the wonted enthusiasm of its devotees, though the roughness which accompanies it when the full excitement of the game is aroused, tends to detract from its charms and from one's admiration of the skill with which it is played; curling, another Scottish game adopted so thoroughly by Canadians that they almost consider it their own; lacrosse, played for the first time on ice, tobogganing, coasting, and skating in its perfection. Ah, what skating! If you visit one of the great skating rinks in Canada, you will find out what skating means. Waltzing is mere child's play, and dancing the lancers a pastime; but just watch the more serious skaters cutting figures of impossible nature with the utmost grace and ease, darting in and out like swallows; and presently, at a signal from the band which is always present on high days, the whole company assemble for what is called “a march,” and twist in and out, and backwards and forwards, and across one and another, with a precision and a finish which appear the perfection of the art.

From time to time, as on the occasion of this carnival, or for some special night as we had at Ottawa, a skating masquerade takes place, and the skaters will appear dressed in character; and sometimes the children get an afternoon devoted to them, and appear as Red Ridinghoods, princes and princesses, clowns and sailors, and red Indians, and so on. These children seem to be brought up on skates, and their little figures in vivid colors flashing past, skating hand in hand, backwards and forwards, make one feel amongst the fairy-talk in very deed.

At Quebec the bob-sleds used for tobogganing purposes down the steep slopes are not the usual flat, wooden toboggan curved at one end, but are iron-tipped, and curved at both ends. But it is the ordinary toboggan which is used on our slides at Government House, where we have had many merry gatherings both by day and by night.

I must leave to some one of more experience to tell about the merry Canadian winter life, of the fishing through the ice-bound waters, the pursuit of the moose, and the methods of winter travelling by means of dog-sleds, adopted by the hardy Hudson Bay Company hunters and the devoted missionaries of the North-West. I have only been able to give a glimpse of first impressions of the winter's recreations of the townsfolk, and even so, I fear, I have not at all conveyed an impression of the condition of things which make this sort of life possible. The sun is a great factor in a Canadian winter, and Canadians tell us how they miss it when they spend their first winter in England; and then the snow, it is not the wet, penetrating snow we know, but the dry, crumbling, shimmering substance, in which it is a pleasure to roll, or to be upset from a toboggan; the deep rivers, too, become permanent roads not only for the snow-shoers (with their long netted snow-shoes, which look rather like lawn-tennis racquets made in the shape of a flat fish), but for carts and wagons and traffic of all kinds; and, in the centre of the river, you can watch huge blocks of ice being hewn out for the butchers and other provision merchants, who keep all their meat, fish, etc., frozen.

But if the winter is enjoyable, let me add a word to describe the beauties of the first Canadian spring. King Winter had, after all, only reigned three months, from the beginning of December, when crash! came the end of his power. And by the middle of March the sledges were discarded,

and the Governor-General could use a carriage and four when going to open Parliament on the 15th of March. What a sight the rivers were about that time! With what cracks and groans did the huge masses of ice break up and drift down the waters, and hurl themselves over the rocky heights. And then, almost before we were aware of it, the woods around Government House were one mass of glorious wild-flowers; the Canadian robin (a bird of the thrush species, for our own little pert robin friends are not known there) were singing in the trees, and tapping on the lawn for their worm victims, and the lovely little blue birds were delighting us with their sweet notes. We were told that there was no spring in Canada—that we should find that summer succeeded winter with a hop skip, and a jump. But I can but record our experience. Certainly we could never wish for six weeks more of perfect and substantial spring weather than we experienced at Ottawa from the end of March.

But I may be asked whether the note of gaiety, on which I have dwelt, is so predominant a feature of Canadian life that it throws all else into the background. Well, frankly speaking, I think this general gaiety and buoyancy is a national trait in Canada, which impresses the newcomer very vividly; but let it be remembered that in a country like Canada all relaxation and recreation must perforce take its proper place. There is happily no room yet for loafers; it is a young country, where all must work who would live, and this applies not only to the men but to the women; and the young ladies who issue forth in brave array for their amusement in the afternoon or evening, are usually very conversant with the details of household work in the morning. If the difficulty of finding and retaining good servants has been felt a real hardship and difficulty, yet it has produced a race of mistresses, whose glory it is that they can, if the necessity arises, be independent of servants altogether. And so long as there is this background of definite work in the lives of the people, it is surely a matter for rejoicing that there should be that capacity for enjoying simple pleasures, and for entering heartily into healthy outdoor amusements, which tends to give proper balance and development to both mind and body, and fitness to perform aright the more serious duties of life.

An Utimation. In the feudal days of Scotland, when noblemen thought it no disgrace to steal their neighbors' cattle, a baron protected his vassals from the aristocratic cattle licker by hanging outright those taken red handed, while waiting for the slow process of the law. When Sir William Scott was a young border laird, he made one night a foray on Sir Gideon Murray's lands. While driving off a herd of cattle he was caught, and, being brought before Sir Gideon, ordered to be hanged. Hanging a cattle thief was such an everyday affair that Sir Gideon went about his ordinary business. But his wife, hearing that a handsome youth of a good family was to be executed, sought her husband and indignantly exclaimed: “Hoot, George, what do I hear? You tak' the life of the winsome young Laird of Harden, wi' three ill faured lassies in the house o' yer ain to marry?” “Ye're richt, Maggie, my dear,” replied the baron, grasping the situation. Wallie shall tak' our muckle mou'd Meg, or else he'll stretch for it.” The helpless prisoner consented, and hunched to his father's surprise, returned home with a bride from the neighbor's house he had ridden out to harry.

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